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March 21st, 1960

COCOM Document No. 3915 B

COORDINATING COMMITTEE

RECORD OF DISCUSSION

ON

FRENCH PROPOSAL TO FREE MAGNESIUM OXIDE

March 10th, 1960

Present: Belgium (Luxembourg), Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States.

Reference: COCOM Document No. 3876.

1. The CHAIRMAN drew the Committee's attention to a French proposal to free magnesium oxide, at present embargoed under Item 13 on the Atomic Energy List. He invited delegates to make known their Governments' views.
2. The NETHERLANDS Delegate stated that his authorities had studied the French Delegation's proposal submitted in COCOM Document No. 3876, and that he had been instructed to support this proposal.
3. The JAPANESE Delegate stated that he had been instructed to support the French Delegation's proposal, because of the mainly civilian uses of magnesium oxide and of its abundance in Soviet Bloc countries, as indicated in the French Memorandum.
4. The ITALIAN Delegate stated that his authorities had reached the same conclusion as the French authorities as regards magnesium oxide. They therefore supported the French proposal to delete this substance from the Atomic Energy List.
5. The UNITED KINGDOM Delegate, referring to the last paragraph of the French Memorandum, noted that the French Delegation proposed that "electro-melted magnesia should be deleted from the International Lists". He assumed that this meant magnesium oxide, which appeared three times in the present definition of Item 13 on the Atomic Energy List, i.e. as a component of refractory materials, as a stabilising agent for zirconium and as a substance used in the composition of crucibles, moulds and pouring rods. The Delegate stated that his authorities had no objection to deleting the magnesium oxide appearing in the third line of the definition of Item 13. They could also agree to free crucibles, moulds and pouring rods composed of magnesium oxide. On the other hand, they believed that the magnesium oxide used with or without lime as a stabilising agent for zirconium should be retained under embargo.
6. The BELGIAN Delegate stated that his authorities believed that magnesium oxide no longer warranted retention under embargo. The Belgian authorities could also therefore support the French proposal.
7. The UNITED STATES Delegate stated that he had been instructed to agree to the French proposal, on the understanding that it was confined to the deletion of the words "magnesium oxide" appearing in the third line of the present definition, and that it did not involve the deletion of the words "magnesium oxide" appearing again in the fifth line. If this were not the case, the Delegate would have to seek further instructions from his Government.

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8. The CANADIAN and DANISH Delegates stated that their Governments had no objection to the French proposal.

9. The GERMAN Delegate stated that, before giving his reply to the French Delegation, he wished to hear further from the latter on the comments made by the United Kingdom and United States Delegates.

10. The FRENCH Delegate confirmed that the United Kingdom Delegate's comment was quite correct. While there was no difference between the words "magnesia" and "magnesium oxide", the term "electro-welded magnesia" could be regarded as more restrictive, in that it designated a special method for producing magnesium oxide. In actual fact, it was the term "magnesium oxide" which should be deleted from the third line of Item 13 on the Atomic Energy List. In reply to a second point raised by the German Delegate, the Delegate stated that his authorities would also be willing to delete from the present definition of Item 13 the magnesium oxide mentioned as a stabilising agent for zirconium, since this use of magnesium was a very special one. If, however, this should necessitate fresh study on the part of the United States Delegation, and hold up their acceptance, he would not insist on it.

11. The GERMAN Delegate believed that this suggestion might involve difficulties of interpretation and complicate the work of the customs officials. He thought it preferable simply to delete the words "magnesium oxide" from the third line of the present definition and to leave the rest of the definition unchanged. In this case, the crucibles, moulds and pouring rods composed of magnesium oxide would be free, but those composed of zirconium stabilised with magnesium oxide would remain under embargo. If it were interpreted thus, his Delegation could agree to the French proposal.

12. The FRENCH Delegate stated that this interpretation was quite correct. In reply to a question from the United Kingdom Delegate, he added that the most common refractory crucibles were of magnesium oxide and their technical characteristics were the least difficult to obtain. For very high temperatures, zirconium oxide was preferred, and this was why it had greater strategic significance.

13. The COMMITTEE noted that all delegations were in favour of the French proposal, and agreed to amend Item 13 on the Atomic Energy List as follows:

"Materials, suitable for use in refractories, composed of 97 per cent or more by weight of beryllium oxide or zirconium oxide, or composed of zirconium oxide stabilised with lime and/or magnesium oxide; and crucibles, moulds and pouring rods composed of any one of the foregoing."

14. The COMMITTEE agreed that the new definition set out above would come into force on the 1st April, 1960, if no objection were raised by that date.

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